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SYMPOSIUM : WHAT ARE THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF ARGUMENTS USED IN CRITICISM OF THE ARTS

Mr. A. H. Hannay, Mr. John Holloway,
Miss M. Macdonald.

I.—*By* A. H. Hannay

It is commonly held that if people disagree about a work of art, they very soon come to a halt and have to agree to disagree. But in fact these disagreements often lead to lengthy arguments, and they can be real arguments and not merely a series of dogmatic assertions by either party. If, for instance, someone were to uphold Sir Joshua Reynolds's criticism of the Venetian painters, and notably of Veronese and Tintoretto, that " the language of painting must indeed be allowed to these masters ; but even in that, they have shown more copiousness than choice, and more luxuriancy than judgment. If we consider the uninteresting subjects of their invention, or at least the uninteresting manner in which they are treated ; if we attend to their capricious composition, their violent and affected contrasts whether of figures or of light and shade, the richness of their drapery and, at the same time, the main effect which the discrimination of stuffs gives to their pictures ; if to these we add their total inattention to expression, and then reflect on the conceptions and the learning of Michael Angelo or the simplicity of Raphael, we can no longer dwell on the comparison. . . . Such as suppose that the great style might happily be blended with the ornamental, that the simple, grave and majestic dignity of Raphael could unite with the glow and bustle of a Paulo or

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Tintoretto, are totally mistaken," most of us would immediately question the validity of the reasons given for disparaging the Venetians—the assumption that there is a single grand style ; that any subject is by itself a criterion of the importance of a work of art ; that rules can be laid down as to proper colouring and so on. In fact the argument on these points has gone on steadily since the time of Reynolds, and rules and subjects, and heroic and grand styles have gradually been discredited, although they often reappear in disguised forms. Such arguments belong to the general theory of art, and behind individual criticisms of a work of art there always lies some general theory, whether it is implicit or explicit. Even behind that form of criticism which is mere evocation and description there is the theory that any arguments about art, other than this particular argument are valueless.

Of course, when a particular work of art is being considered, argument is not enough, and even if there is no disagreement over a theory, there may still be disagreement about the value of the work of art, a so-called disagreement *in taste.* In a later passage of his discourses, Reynolds writes : " De Piles recommends to us portrait painters to add grace and dignity to the character of those whose pictures we draw. So far he is undoubtedly right ; but unluckily he descends to particular, and gives us his own idea of grace and dignity. " If," says he " you draw persons of high character and dignity, they ought to be drawn in such an attitude that the portraits must seem to speak to us of themselves, and as it were to say to us, ' Stop, take notice of me.' " He goes on in this manner with all the characteristics we can think of. We may contrast the tumour of this presumptuous loftiness with the naturally unaffected art of the portraits of Titian, where dignity, seeming to be natural and inherent, draws spontaneous references. . . . The painters, many of them at least, have not been backward in adopting the notions contained in these precepts The portraits of Rigaud are perfect examples of an implicit observance of the rules of De Piles."

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Here we have an appreciation and an adverse criticism ; an appreciation of the simple dignity of the portraits of Titian and an attack on the portraits of Rigaud because of their pompous grandeur.

Now the only means of understanding and checking up on these criticisms is by looking at the portraits and attempting to repeat the imaginative processes of the artists. It is not, of course, merely a matter of looking. A child can do that and be thoroughly bored, and not only a child. It is a matter of imaginative insight ; conceptual argument will be of no use. We do in a sense argue, but by pointing and drawing attention to the features and passages that we particularly like or dislike, and by re-expressing our feelings in words, so that even if the other person does not at the moment see what we see in the picture, he will get the sense of it and may gradually come to agree with us.

Or we can turn away from the picture and scrutinise the mental processes of our opponent. For instance, while I agree with Reynolds's appreciation of Titian's portraits, I am a little doubtful about his thorough condemnation of those of Rigaud. I fully agree as to the possibility of a portrait being pompous and vulgarly ostentatious, but I suspect that Reynolds's disapproval of Rigaud was due to prejudice, and not to a genuine insight into Rigaud's sentiment, or rather alleged absence of it, for pompousness is a counterfeiting of sentiment. And if I were discussing the matter with Reynolds, I would suggest that he was making too much of a rule of simplicity, and so condemning Rigaud because his style was flamboyant and full of gestures ; that there is no intrinsic superiority in simplicity of style and that the baroque and rococo styles can be as much the vehicles of genuine sentiment as the less florid classical or Renaissance styles. I would, that is to say, partly return to reasoning and argument, and partly try to analyse the psychological make-up of Reynolds's judgment. We all know from our own experience how thoroughly we can become biased in favour of a certain style, and tend to disparage anything which does not conform with the rules of that style. Until recently, before the modern

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development of what is called the historical sense, each new period always reacted strongly against the style of the preceding period ; thus Gothic art was condemned as barbarous by Reynolds, who was also reacting against the baroque period from which he was emerging.

If Reynolds had been confronted with this kind of argument and had been able to resist the impulse angrily to set it aside, he would have had to do some serious introspection to see whether he was not moved by bias. But the introspection would no doubt be helped by the removal of the assumption apparently entertained by him without question that a work of art should be a combination of general qualities, such as simplicity, grace, grandeur, etc., for which rules can be laid down. With his mind cleared of bias and freed from the inhibiting effect of mistaken theories, he might then have begun to enjoy the sentiment of Rigaud. On the other hand, he might have said : " Although I now realise that generalities such as simplicity or dignity are not criteria, but only useful descriptions of certain types of work, I still think, on looking at his work again, that Rigaud is pompous." Is he ? Go and look.

It is this direct and apparently unmediated approach which is variously described as taste, imagination, intuition, emotional reaction or awareness of beauty and so on. But it should be noted that when we have to talk about individual works of art, we do not, unless we are in a hurry, just say we think them beautiful, or they give us a fine intuition, or a grand emotion ; we say " Savonarola, Mordecai, Deronda, are tapestry figures carefully woven ; she (George Eliot) has invented, theorised in the making of them. The neighbourhood of Middlemarch (on the other hand) leaves every neighbour standing squarely in his own right " (*Times Literary Supplement*, 30.10.48), or, " Take, for instance, a design like Les Coulisses. Such a way of cutting the figures and of placing the two faces in the top corner of the rectangle is unthinkable at any previous period in European art. . . . Here we get what exactly suits Degas's detective instinct ; the sensation of having stumbled upon the scene unawares, of its being by accident, that this

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peephole has let us into the secret. That appearance of a fortuitous and casual apparition increases the allusion that this is life itself only momentarily passing across our field of vision ; and yet with that appearance of accident, that dispersal of the centres of interest, see how he has managed to get in all the significant facts." (Roger Fry on Degas in " Characteristics of French Art.")

It will be observed that in these criticisms which have been selected more or less at random, the attention is focused on individual features. Certain of George Eliot's characters, for instance, are said to have been laboured. Now we can all understand the psychological process involved in being laboured, and although we arrive at this understanding by looking into ourselves, the process which we observe has definitely ascertainable features. It is true, of course, that in the features of the works of art which are praised, emotion is always said to be present, and one of the objections to a character that is laboured is that it is an intellectual product devoid of emotion. Yet in the critical analysis, the emotion is not abstracted and spoken of as existing by itself, as it is in many theories of art ; it is implied rather than dwelt on. What is dwelt on is the individual trait which some people would say gives rise to the emotion, but I would prefer to say in which the emotion inheres. " Look at the graceful movement of that figure," we say, or " Compare the regular lines of this planned and dignified street with the hotch potch of that collection of individualist buildings " or " Look at the flashy vulgarity of that modern wardrobe with its cheaply contrasted walnut veneers." It will no doubt be claimed that this last instance relates purely to an excess of personal feeling, but vulgarity is not mere feeling. It is a complex of motives of self-assertion and ostentation, and a forced feeling. It is a process that we can observe and repeat in ourselves.

And although the emotional and imaginative processes which go to make up the understanding and appreciation of a work of art are individual and unique, they can nevertheless be designated by general terms, such as humourous or tragic, passionate or graceful, sensuous or sublime. These

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general terms can be predicated even of musical works and not just idly and as a matter of academical classification. They serve as pointers, as a means of directing and canalising appreciation. But although they characterise a work of art and are a useful part of the critical apparatus, they are not normative. We cannot, or rather we should not insist on a work of art being dignified or sublime, or graceful or plastic, or possessing a combination of these characteristics ; nor is the position any different if, instead of concentrating as I have done, on emotional qualities, we deal in what are usually called technical qualities such as recession or composition in pictures, metre or stress in poetry, style and choice of words in prose, homophony and polyphony in music. The complete critic should be concerned both with the technical and the emotional, but not separately because they are, or should be, fused together. The artistic medium is the vehicle of expression ; a sculpture in wood differs from a sculpture in bronze not merely technically but in emotional significance. It is, of course, sometimes useful to treat of the technical aspect as though it were independent. We can, for example, examine how Seurat employed his pointilliste technique, breaking up the secondary colours into small dots of primary colours, and how he achieved recession and solidity of form. But there is always a danger in such studies, in passing from the descriptive to the normative ; the technical method of one artist is set up as a standard with which to judge the work of other artists, and this is fatal.

One of the differences between a judgment based on a technical standard or rule and a judgment based on a free imaginative process is that the former is purely an act of recognition of general characteristics. If we have a rule about the proper proportions of a building, then all that is necessary is to take the measurements of buildings that we are attempting to judge in order to find out whether they conform to the rule. If they do we shall know that the buildings are to be admired ; if not, that they are to be condemned as bad art. This act of recognition is just ordinary perception. The rule, however, will have been

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originally derived from the measurements of a building, say the Parthenon, which was first judged to be beautiful without any knowledge of the rule. This original judgment will have belonged to the imaginative class. Ever since people began to reflect about art, there has been a tendency to believe that the aim was to construct a critical apparatus which would enable artists to produce good work almost automatically, and the public to judge without difficulty or mistake. This assumption is no longer entertained in the best quarters. On the other hand it is usually maintained that the critic and theorist can be of no assistance or give no directions to the artist or the public. Yet it is giving a direction to say that a novelist should not create tapestry figures, which means of course, stock types without individuality. While this does not prescribe the kind of individuality which should be created, it does prescribe a general form. And if a work of art is criticized as being a mere imitation of some other artist, the implication is that the work of art should possess originality. Or again, when it is complained that a playwright is moralising or engaging in a theoretical discussion, this is laying down a certain form which a work of art should take. Thus with all the concepts which are used in modern art criticism (and in my view quite rightly used), there is built up a framework within which the artist is *expected* to construct his individual work. He can be moral but he should not just moralize or write an ethical essay. He can be representational, but he should not just copy what he sees (a complicated conception) ; he can be derivative but he should add something of his own. He should express sentiment, but he should not force the emotion. He can be historical, but he should not spend his time considering whether the event that he describes actually happened just as he described it. He can have a purpose outside the work of art, *e.g.* bringing about a social reform ; but he must at the same time make the work self-sufficient ; and so on. Nor, as is often suggested, is the effect of these principles purely negative, inasmuch as they tell the artist what he should not do without indicating what he should

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do. The effect is positive since an indication is given as to the kind of form (admittedly a dangerous word) which the work of art should possess. And the principles are framed and the critical judgments made, not out of a purely academical interest, but in order to purify taste and assist creation. We do not, as is too often supposed, first decide through unmediated feeling or intuition, that a work is good or bad, and then erect a wholly superfluous super-structure of theory which gets us no farther ; the theory is required in order to qualify our inchoate feelings which were themselves accompanied by confused theories.

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II.—*By* JOHN HOLLOWAY.

THE characteristic activity of the critic, like the moralist, is to provide the grounds of value-judgments, if not perhaps the judgments themselves. But the special feature of the critic's problem is that what he evaluates is usually complex and esoteric ; that is, only training and skill equip us to discover its nature. Because this is so, interpretation is a much more important part of criticizing than of moralizing. Moreover, unlike a moralist prescribing duties, the critic must analyse and discuss the work of art he is considering, far beyond the point where he becomes sure that his general verdict is favourable or unfavourable ; and again, the critic cannot complete his work by a simplifying short cut, but the duty-prescriber is often not only allowed, but actually required to do this. These facts suggest a different relative prominence of the various constituents of criticizing and moralizing. Much more than a moral opinion, a criticism is an interpretation, an explanation from an expert. This is what is called for, because we agree in general that it is more difficult to understand works of art than moral situations, and less important, perhaps, to agree about them. Not all moralists, of course, do the same things ; and those prescribing duties are less like the critic than are those that describe this or that admirable way of life—the mystic's, the warrior's, the philosopher's.

Interpreting is not describing ; this is unnecessary, the critic assumes a direct acquaintance, past or possible, with the work he interprets. Therefore the critic's problem is to draw attention, not describe. It is possible to draw attention to this or that feature of a work of art in several different ways. (1) Plain descriptive language. The small vocabulary available for this method emphasizes the importance of other methods. (2) Figurative language (*e.g.*, a " glittering " style). (3) Writing which itself manifests those features of the subject-work to which the critic is drawing

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attention ; for one reason or another, these features can be more conspicuous in the critique than in the original (often called " evocative criticism "). (4) Saying something of the process by which the work of art was, or may have been, created. Mr. Hannay refers to this method at one point in his paper, when he speaks of certain George Eliot characters as " laboured," and refers not to something about the words on the paper, but to a " psychological process " which I take to be that of the authoress. Compare expressions like " his characters are seen from the inside," " they come from the depths of the creative imagination," and words like " effortless," " sincere," and many others. (5) Describing not the work of art itself, but the precise nature of one's reactions to it—reactions, of course, not simply of pleasure or pain. This method is effective, (*a*) because it causes the reader to scan the work more attentively, to see whether any feature of it does for him what something has presumably done for the critic ; (*b*) because reading a description of a state of mind often evokes a faint trace of it, and this evocation begun by the critic may be carried on by something in the work—which thereby reveals itself.

This last method of drawing attention is so important, that the vocabulary of criticism largely hangs in suspension between a psychological interpretation, and an " objective " —that is, one which gives a sense to the words by referring them to features of works of art recognizable independent of the feelings they tend to evoke. Moreover, most of the descriptive element of criticism seems to contain, implicitly, an element of valuation.

If this is true, it is an important point. Is it proper for a critic to make use of these indirect and at the same time somehow precipitate methods of interpretation ? Admittedly they are easily misused ; but they are not essentially improper by comparison with some method essentially proper. Even critics perhaps wisely content to stop when the interpretation stage is complete are providing grounds for valuation. With this in mind, one can see that to describe a work of art exhaustively, in neutral terms referring only to " objective " features, is both difficult and circuitous.

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Difficult, because the element of uniformity is anyhow low, and the most constantly recurring features are often enough those of least critical interest. This makes it hard even to construct a useful plain vocabulary. Difficult also because works of art evoke in the critic, immediately, a variety of sentiments and feelings, of which admiration or the reverse is likely to be one. As all these naturally influence his choice of words, his descriptive interpretation will be likely to hint at these various emotions, and through them at the valuation he sets on the work. To eradicate this he must work against the grain, rejecting expressions that come naturally, seeking recondite expressions. Neutral description of critically significant features is a limit that a critic may more easily approach than reach. But more than this, attempting to eliminate the value-implications of the initial description is circuitous to the precise degree that this value (first hinted at, as it were, by accident) is the same as that the critic will wish to include in his final evaluation. When this identity exists, attempting to extrude the value-implications means removing something that later the critic will want to put back ; and once it has gone, replacing it often looks arbitrary, as one knows from attempts to base criticisms of style on word-counts. But does this mean that the critic has to beg the question, to infer that a work has merit of a certain kind and degree, not simply from what it is like, but from a description of what it is like, doctored to give him his conclusion ? Not necessarily. " This work is good because harmonious," for example, is not an inference like " this object is sweet because rosy and apple-like." It is not an inference from observed to unobserved ; not indeed an inference at all. The value judgment finds its proof directly, in the object ; but what validates it can be seen only by a sensitive observer whose attention is properly directed. Critical discussion takes the form it does, to sensitize and direct our powers of observation.

This line of thought implies that our initial question is loosely framed : argumentation, it might be said, is not natural to criticism at all ; criticism does not proceed by actual inference from observation, but simply by its

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progressively refined use. In the sense of arrangement of propositions justifying a logical inference, critical arguments are not arguments at all. On this view we should distinguish between the apparent movement of the alleged argument and its real movement. The apparent movement is that we observe a particular feature in a work of art (for example, its diffuseness, its symmetry of design, its realism, its unity of style) ; subsume this under a general rule setting a certain positive or negative value on such a feature ; and infer therefore that the given work had such a value other things being equal. But the real movement would be that we should see a certain feature gracing or blemishing the work, and should refer to its presence first in a statement about it alone, and then in another about the work itself as modified by this feature ; and after many such evaluations, should catalogue these tendencies of evaluation if we chose to do so (though our catalogue would necessarily lag behind our sensibility). This is the view in effect held by many critics about the canons of art. Coleridge says that no work of art can be judged on any standards but its own ; T. S. Eliot, that we should admit as many aesthetics as there are original minds ; I. A. Richards, that critical evaluation is ultimately a process of choice unsupported by rules. All these assertions suggest that criticism is no place for inference of the logical kind.

But being a good critic requires expertise as well as a refined sensibility. It is this which enables a critic, if necessary, to override his spontaneous valuations, those hinted at in the initial description, and replace them by others. He corrects them, if at all, by reference to the canons of the art. That is to say, these canons sometimes genuinely have normative force ; they are not simply generalizations about taste, but are allowed to mould it. In order to discover their mode of operation in critical discussions we must consider first how, if at all, their influence might be defended.

Often, of course, they are not defended. But in Aristotle's *Poetics*, that storehouse of aesthetic principles and perennial inspiration of rule-loving critics, arguments are constantly

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given in favour of the canons ; and they refer, of all things, to what is generally true of the reactions of those being entertained by the art—for example, spectators in the theatre. The canons prescribe features evoking responses that observers may be relied upon to consider as reasons why a work is admirable, and reject those that operate conversely. This suggests an explanation why canons are usually about combinations of features (a dramatic structure but disregard of dramatic unities, a heroic subject and a mean style, abstractly described characters and features designed to evoke intense personal sympathies, and so on). Almost anything may be favourably received if it is adequately accompanied.

Many canons, then, may have originated as general guides to the psychology of response of those patronizing the particular art. But still, we occasionally wish to defer to the authority of a canon, although our preferences would naturally arrange themselves so as to infringe it, were we not to give it explicit regard. In other words, the given case is an exception to the canon, if this is thought of simply as a psychological generalization ; but nevertheless we tend to defer to it. Why should this be so ? This question cannot be answered by saying that the canon is believed to express a true general principle of artistic value, because we are concerned to know whether anything can be said of how this belief comes to be adopted. In particular, has this belief any connection with those spontaneous valuations which can occur before any principles are formulated ?

One may suggest that, first, certain kinds of response regularly tend to make us set value on works evoking them ; and that such responses (like a sense of continuity, or novelty, or completeness, or harmony, or intensity) can be identified by their quality, and recognized independently of our also setting the usual value upon the work. Second, responses of these kinds may be more or less correlated (though by no means exhaustively) with " objective " features in the work describable in non-psychological terms ; and these features, in their turn, may often be distinguished independent of their evoking this or that psychological response. For example, we could identify an impression of

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intensity of feeling independent of actually admiring, say, the poem that gave us this impression ; and further, could recognize features like a low proportion of words not important to the sense, highly selective description, and certain kinds of image, diction, or metrical pattern, which were often correlated with such impressions. And we could distinguish these features (perhaps in other poems) independent of their having the usual psychological effect on us. Finally we could, in noticing this feature, give our attention primarily to it simply, or to the fact that it was a feature satisfying a canon.

We can now trace how canons assert themselves independently, provided we accept the recognized psychological principle that things first valued as means to value come to be valued for themselves. Then we can distinguish : (1) Simple admiration of the work, not distinguishing any of its qualities. Canons are not yet involved. (2) Admiration specifically because the work evokes a response (not of course admiration) of a definite kind ; and admiration might be less or absent, were we not to recognize the response explicitly as what it is. When we admire for this reason, we may formulate a canon recommending works that evoke such a response. (3) Admiration specifically because the work has a certain intrinsic feature, though this may not evoke its characteristic psychological response, and we might not admire the work except that we recognize the presence of this feature explicitly. (4) Admiration for a work not simply because it has a certain intrinsic feature, but because by virtue of having the feature, it satisfies a canon of the art.

These later varieties are less important in practice, than in helping us to understand what is going on in the more sophisticated critical discussion. Even (4) has some practical importance, though, because that a work conspicuously satisfies the canons, especially all the canons, of its art, is largely what is meant by words like " masterly," " disciplined " or " classical " in criticism.

Now, deciding to admire for any of these reasons constitutes formulating a canon (in the case of (4), what had better be called a second-order canon) ; and conversely,

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adopting a canon constitutes coming to admire in accordance with one of these patterns. "Admire" is an ambiguous word, but there is of course no reason why in these cases it should take only a believing form in the narrowest sense of "belief." That a work has a quality commended in some canon often evokes feelings of admiration. The existence of a recognized canon, especially a body of canons, complicates the universe. Works of art can do new things; and it is no more arbitrary or artificial that they should evoke admiration, as either a belief or a feeling, for doing these things than for doing anything. Last, referring other people to the canons is, sometimes, simply informing them of certain relatively recondite facts—to wit, existing artistic traditions. By doing this, we add to their equipment for evaluating works of art, much as when we tell them that noble characters have a weak side, or that actions are governed in part by economic forces. We give them fuller information about the world

The psychological tendency, mentioned above, explains why we accord these features significance; it does not, of course, show that they really have it. But some indirect light is shed upon the intrinsic status of canons by the exceptions to them. These appear to be of two sorts: first, simple cases when the canon and our natural taste happen to be at variance; and second, much more interesting cases where what the canon condemns as a blemish seems not merely harmless, but specifically the reason why a work should be admired. This is true (to take a trivial instance) when what seems to be the admirable feature of a limerick is that its rhymes surprise the expectations which its form and style create; or (more important cases) when we assert that a poem has merit specifically because it oscillates between dictions, moods, or subjects generally accepted as incompatible, or that a novel acquires distinction specifically through breaking up its own unity with digressions or a shifting "point of view." These cases are important. They suggest that canons do not merely have exceptions, but actually make them possible. Whenever a canon is formulated, artists have two new aids to success: conspicuous observance, and conspicuous disregard. But this is true

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because knowledge that it is a recognized canon creates new psychological tendencies, both subservient and rebellious, in those interested in the art and its tradition. If we admit that exceptions of this second kind exist, though, we undoubtedly make the validity of canons depend upon movements of taste. Either the critic will always have regard to more features of the works he evaluates than are referred to in his canons ; or else the system of canons must contain contradictory pairs.

One may, of course, deny the existence of these, or indeed any exceptions to canons ; the disadvantage is that one must then, often enough, allow the canons to override the valuations of art that we most naturally make and profoundly want to keep. The temptation, in order to avoid this, is to reformulate the canons so as to allow for exceptions. Some of Mr. Hannay's canons are apparently of this kind. The artist " can be moral but he should not *just* moralize . . . he should not *just* copy . . . he should not *force* the emotion . . . should make the work *self-sufficient* " and so on (italics mine). None of these, I think, could have exceptions. But this method is unwise ; for all that we can make safe against exceptions is a single strand of truism. Certainly these principles can be useful guides, just as " every man has his price " is a useful guide ; but while they are without exception as truisms, it is not as truisms that they are useful. Their use lies in their fallibility, before the point of its arrival.

But on this view, it is intrinsic to the nature of canons that they should have exceptions, and this is why something other than a canon must be what really determines the critical judgment, and decides, even, that the canon has been observed effectively, just as it decides occasionally that the artist has effectively defied it. If so, however, what after all can be the purpose of referring to canons, but creating an impression of logical proof where none exists ? There are several purposes. One has already been mentioned. The canon is a voluntarily accepted means of increasing the difficulty and therefore the interest of the artistic performance, and the tradition of an art hands it on

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and proffers it as such. Besides this, by reminding us of a canon, the critic emphasizes that the work before us has the feature that the canon demands, or has no such feature. Thus the canon has an indicative function, drawing our attention to a feature that may be sure to influence our judgment if we see it, but that may well elude us ; and the feature to which attention is thus drawn may be the feature the canon demands, or the feature of satisfying the canon by having this primary feature. By setting a work of art against the canons of the art we emphasize its classical or revolutionary character.

Our responses, even to the so-called primary features of works of art, entirely lack the regularity of a mechanism ; and reference to the canons of the art is important in modifying the observer's condition. It puts him, by association even, in the frame of mind typical of his critical moments. He is obliged, moreover, to give attention to the work while manipulating a categorial scheme that connects with it ; and the effect is likely to be that he is, in his attention to the object, more keenly conscious, more discriminating, more ready to reflect generally, than he otherwise would be Again, the canon reminds him, surreptitiously, of a whole range of other works, and of his responses to them. It can have this effect because these other experiences either led him to accept it, or at least confirm it for him. Then, reminding him of the canon reminds him of the general trend of his sensibility, and so makes his present response more typical of his whole outlook, discouraging him from judging peremptorily or on partial consideration. Compare a general exhorting his troops, and saying either " no good soldier flees when the enemy is stronger," or " will you, who chose to fight against odds at A, and B, and C, . . . choose now to run away ? " These appeals need not constitute a trick played upon the hearer, because he may welcome them, or even attempt so to appeal to himself.

And it is one of the distinctive features of critical discussions, that in them we should seek to modify the sensibility of others much more fully than in ethical. This is important

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in considering the formulation of new canons. Every new canon proffers a new way of looking at objects and suggests a new sense of what is important in them. This cannot easily be done in ethics, except by attacking the existing corpus of principles, and destroying their authority ; for the ethical system is supposed to be comprehensive. There are no occasions when we may experiment with a new way of looking at right and wrong ; or if there are, then there is a principle, ethical by definition, which says so (*e.g.*, that of periodic orgies, where adopted). But the notion of alternative canons and of freedom to experiment first with one, then with another, is not altogether foreign to criticism. It is part of the critical outlook to be always on the watch for a new point of vision and thus a new kind of beauty. In effect, we partly noticed this in observing that formulating any canon paved the way to formulating another, logical contradictory of the first. So with new and independent canons. These things are simply part of the meanings given to words like " aesthetic " and " ethical." That the system of critical canons is naturally self-additive, that of ethical, naturally self-sealing, only follows from what norms are on the whole called by which name. It is part of the critic's function to see and emphasize what of good may be found even in bad art. He may need to emphasize the distinctive psychological attraction of diffuseness or inconsistency or indeed pedestrianism. This method is more or less foreign not only to the kind of moralizing which prescribes duties, but also to most other kinds. In moral argument the element of controlling conduct or limiting choice is always prominent ; in criticism it is weak by comparison, and the emphasis is rather upon creating a subtler, more comprehensive understanding of what the objects of study contain.

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III.—*By* Margaret Macdonald.

I.

In his Preface Wordsworth says that he would not wish it to be supposed that he entertained the foolish hope of *reasoning* the reader into an approbation of the Lyrical Ballads. And it does seem queer to suppose that anyone could be *argued* into admiring *Persuasion* or condemning *The Stag at Eve*. This seems as absurd as to imagine one could love and hate by argument. Yet the Preface increased the size of the volume by more than a score of pages. Whether or not this was argument, Wordsworth does not seem to have regarded it as a perfectly useless activity.

As Mr. Holloway observes, works of art are esoteric objects. That they hang on walls, together with mirrors ; stand on shelves with lamps and inkpots ; that we hear them as we do the noises of birds and trains disguises their complexity. They are not simple objects of sense perception. This may be less misleadingly expressed by saying that we do not use the term " work of art " as simply equivalent to any terms describing physical objects and events. Those who listen to the concert, walk round the gallery, read the poem may have roughly similar sense perceptions, but some get a great deal more than others from what is perceived and judge it differently. What is this " something more," how is it acquired and by what criterion is the subsequent judgment of value deemed to be right or wrong ?

Wordsworth obviously thought that the Ballads might misfire and be received with indifference, amazement or contempt. He tried to forestall this reaction by some account of the poems and their production which should show that such a judgment would be hasty and ill-considered, if not wrong. He was writing as a critic and not as a poet.

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For critics attempt a certain kind of explanation of works of art with the object of establishing correct judgments of their artistic merit.

This kind of explanation of works of art may be distinguished from two others ; those of scholarship and history. Scholarship establishes, *e.g.*, the original text of a literary and the correct score of a musical work. The scholar may, perhaps, without derogation, be compared to the expert picture cleaner. Both enable us to become acquainted with the original work instead of a begrimed and inaccurate substitute. The historian provides dates and other biographical and social information. We know as the result of these what was produced and why by a particular artist at a certain date. We still do not know its artistic value, *i.e.*, whether and why it is a good specimen of its kind. To fill this gap is the task of the critic. Our problem is to elucidate what he does and how he does it. As Mr. Hannay points out, if disputation about art is not mere futile wrangling there must be some standards of appeal by which dispute may be terminated. They are provided in logic by the principles of reasoning ; in science by scientific method and verifiable fact. These are applicable in scholarship and history. The propositions of scholars and historians are about verifiable facts and are established by, or by something very like, the normal procedures of scientific method. Are there comparable criteria in art criticism ? We certainly do not think that all judgments about art are of equal value. That critical procedures are admitted to differ from those of the establishment of facts is perhaps shown by the circumstance that Fleet Street employs political, racing and scientific " correspondents " ; but literary, music, art and dramatic " critics." Correspondents report facts ; critics are evidently expected to perform a different task.

But Mr. Hannay, I think, wants to establish a criterion of agreement about critical conclusions in some processes of reasoning or verification. He says : " behind individual criticisms of a work of art there always lies some general theory whether it is implicit or explicit ". But I am

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puzzled about this use of " theory." It seems to assume that from observation of a selection of works of art, critics formulate hypotheses about a standard which all artists " ought " to achieve and by which their works may be judged. Further observation reveals contrary instances which refute the hypothesis which is then superseded by an alternative. We are familiar with this procedure in science. But what sort of observation is relevant and what constitutes contrary instances, in art ? Was Wordsworth establishing a contrary instance to the theory that all good poetry is written in a certain style ? Must one then reject Milton and Pope in favour of Wordsworth and Coleridge as one rejects Newton in favour of Einstein ? Mr. Hannay instances the example of Reynolds and the " grand style." He " would question the validity of the reasons given by Reynolds for disparaging the Venetians " presumably by showing that Venetian painting is good though it does not conform to Reynolds' criterion. He would reinforce his contention by telling Reynolds various causes why his opinion might be mere prejudice. But he does not indicate about precisely what Reynolds can be proved to be mistaken and prejudiced. The Aristotelian physicists who refused to look down Galileo's telescope rejected the new facts which would refute their theories. We agree that what is seen through telescopes is relevant to the establishment of astronomical theory. But what new facts about the Venetians has Mr. Hannay discovered which Reynolds refused to admit ? Roger Fry observes :

" Reynolds was so entirely at home in Venetian art ; he felt its appeal so intensely, even basing upon it his own most magnificent designs and learning from it the secret of his rich and transparent colouring ; that in the endeavour not to rate beyond its worth a style of which he was himself a master, he actually decried it more than justice required."[1]

We may agree that he did, but not, I suggest from ignorance or prejudice. I doubt whether we could enlighten Reynolds on Venetian art. Yet he judged it inferior because not in the manner of Michael Angelo and Raphael. The

[1] Reynolds Discourses ed. Roger Fry, 1905. Introduction to 4th Discourse.

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Venetians were merely " ornamental." Mr. Hannay's disagreement with Reynolds seems to resolve itself into one not about facts or logic but nomenclature. This may not be trifling, but is quite different from disagreement about theory.

I think, however, that the view which Mr. Hannay wishes to oppose to that of Reynolds is that judgments of artistic merit are immediate responses to certain emotional states conveyed by artists in their work, which we know from experience and can reproduce imaginatively in evaluating the work. Works of art are not judged by general rules, as Reynolds supposed. To understand and check up on criticisms of Rigaud one must look at his portraits and " try to repeat the imaginative process of the artist " The vulgarity of the piece of furniture is " a process that we can observe and repeat in ourselves." We can recognize the laborious effort of George Eliot in producing the characters of " Daniel Deronda." About these we can come to agree by something like an empirical test.

It would be foreign to our theme to discuss the thesis that works of art express emotional states. But Mr. Hannay does not tell us by what criterion he would determine whether he had correctly reproduced the emotional state of Rigaud and thus discovered whether or not he was being pompous. What seems to me wrong in the present suggestion, if I have understood it, is that critical discussion conducts a factual investigation into the mental processes either of an artist or the members of his audience. For this seems to make criticism just another exercise in empirical—including perhaps clinical—psychology. Do we really care whether Rigaud felt genuine sentiment in respect of his sitters ? I don't believe we do or that it affects our judgment of his work. There is, however, no doubt that some critics do take this view. Certain critics of Shakespeare, *e.g.*, express themselves as trying to discover " what Shakespeare really meant " ; " what was in his mind " ; " what he was trying to express," etc. The temptation to say this is very understandable since it might be supposed that

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such information would provide an objective standard of interpretation, if not of evaluation. For the problem of agreement about the interpretation of a work is often as acute as that about its merit. If we could know the state of mind in which the work was produced we could interpret it correctly. But this is an illusion. For a work of art is not a state of mind or the result of such a state plus technical ability to handle a medium. What could the artist tell us about his state of mind which, with skill in the use of words, would be equivalent to *King Lear*? Still less do we seem to appreciate our own states of mind in a work of art or make them the criterion of artistic merit. It is, surely not the critic's task to report either his own or the artist's biography.

Mr. Holloway denies that critical discussion is a procedure of inferring from propositions about the interpretation of a work to a value judgment. It is, I think he wants to suggest, rather a technique to direct observation rightly, call attention to significant features, stimulate and develop aesthetic sensibility in respect of particular works. Critics do not formulate general standards and apply these mechanically to all, or to classes of, works of art. For every work of art is unique and in the last resort, perhaps, can be judged by no standards but its own. But, though unique, a work of art does not occur in isolation, but as parts of bodies of similar works and within an artistic tradition. Throughout the history of an art there have accumulated a number of rules, prescriptions, prohibitions, called "canons of the art." A wise critic relates his spontaneous judgment to the wisdom distilled in these formulæ though neither artist nor critic regards them as absolute norms. Indeed, their very existence may prove a challenge to defy or go beyond them. (*The Blue Boy* was Gainsborough's answer to one of Reynolds' strictures about colour). Critical canons are, perhaps, more like rules of etiquette than morals and very unlike scientific laws or logical principles. They may be infringed and they do not form a closed system. Nevertheless, they are of use in setting artistic problems and connecting critical judgments within a framework which

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discourages crankiness and partiality. The final standard, however, is the direct response to a work of art ; the judgment of personal taste, and this may contravene all canons.

If I have understood Mr. Holloway correctly, I should not disagree with this account as a description of the procedure of many critics. He does not, however, examine its logical structure or attempt to estimate its value as a method of obtaining reliable judgments about works of art. He does not, *e.g.*, say whether the judgment of aesthetic value is a statement of certain feelings about the work or is of some other form. He observes that " The value judgment finds its proof, directly, in the object ; but what validates it can be seen only by a sensitive observer whose attention is properly directed." What is drawn attention to, however, does not, strictly, *prove* the value judgment, since this is not an inferred conclusion. But Mr. Holloway does not discuss whether the procedure is, alternatively, that of persuading to acceptance of the value judgment, or of some other type. I am also puzzled by this feature " in the object " which can be seen only by a specially qualified observer. It is plain that a person who is tone deaf cannot appreciate Bach ; that a blind man is bereft of the enjoyment of pictures. Perhaps only great stupidity or very narrow experience prevent the enjoyment of literary works ; though most of us are cut off from an appreciation of masterpieces in Welsh. But Mr. Holloway is not concerned with all these unfortunates. He observes as one of the distinctive features of critical discussions that in them we seek to modify the sensibility of others more than in ethical. What is this endowment which talking can modify ? What is its relation to features in an object with which we seem to be acquainted only by sense perception and understanding of, *e.g.*, language and musical notation ? We do not expect conversation to improve our eyesight and hearing, though it may improve our understanding by giving new information or fresh ways of dealing with information. But it is not quite clear what information is being given and how. Is artistic sensibility a special kind of sensation or a particular flair possessed by certain

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privileged people? If so, how is it recognised apart from appreciating works of art? These are not purely rhetorical questions for an affirmative answer to them would explain some of the disturbing differences in judgments about works of art. If some people are born philistines their pronouncements about art may be safely ignored. Like those of the blind man about pictures, they could only parrot those of the better endowed. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Holloway gives no method of identifying these empty vessels. It is true that a study of critical writings combined with a rich experience of works of art will improve our aesthetic judgments. But is this analogous to the sense in which a prolonged, but discriminating experience of foods and drinks improves an epicure's palate? He does, no doubt, distinguish savours blurred or inaccessible to cruder tastes but of the same sort as they would enjoy after similar training. It is far less clear what kind of improvement occurs in aesthetic judgment.

Finally, this point is connected with Mr. Holloway's observations on the fallibility of canons. About a value judgment in accordance with canons there will, or may be, general agreement among critics. But when a work or a judgment contravenes a canon what distinguishes a justified from an unjustified infringement? Mr. Holloway does not discuss this, but I do not think he would want to hold that the decision is simply one of personal preference. If, however, it were a breach in favour of a feature discriminated by a special sense or a more carefully trained sense its independence of mere whim or folly would be assured.

II.

The logical type of value judgments is relevant to the question whether critical discussion is argument to prove true and false propositions. I think no one would now wish to maintain that judgments of aesthetic value are simply descriptions of physical or psychological facts. For the statement that an object has certain qualities or an observer certain states is not an evaluation. At most, it

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could bear some relation to evaluation. "This is good" does not *say* either "This has certain qualities" or "I admire this." Nor do I propose to recanvas the arguments against supposing that value judgments assert the presence in objects of the non-natural quality "aesthetic goodness" or "beauty." And while those who affirm value judgments certainly take favourable and unfavourable attitudes to what is evaluated, value judgments seem to do more than express personal attitudes. For critics adjudicate; they affirm merit and demerit of works of art. "This is good" has the form of the statement "This is red"; it also has the form of the impersonal verdict "He is guilty" with which, perhaps, it may be more profitably compared. The function of critics may first be compared with that of judges at show, examiners, etc. For these, too, estimate certain achievements and indicate a decision of merit by certain signs. "Good" in the aesthetic sense is rather like a seal on artistic performances; it indicates "This is worthy of praise." Thus to affirm that a work is good is more like bestowing a medal than naming it or any feature of it or of the states of its creators and beholders. Verdicts and awards are not true or false. They are, however, justified and unjustified. Both the verdict and the competence of the judges may be contested. But the opposition protests that the verdict was wrong or unjust; not that it was false or invalid.

If this account were accepted, it would follow that critical discussions cannot establish value judgments by deductive and inductive inference. They are not deduced by reasoning or confirmed by empirical evidence. We cannot, as Wordsworth said, be *argued* into a favourable verdict on the Lyrical Ballads. Must it then be concluded that such a verdict can be obtained only by graft, sales talk, wheedling or whatever other device will influence a capricious fancy? But this overlooks that judges judge and that critics are judges of works of art. The word "judge" does not properly apply to those, like the Duchess in "Alice" who indulge a liking for cutting off heads. Nor to those, more amiable, like the Dodo, who give prizes to

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everyone. Even a bad judge, if he judges, makes some pretence of observing a procedure other than mere caprice. Likewise, a critic, worthy of the name, distributes verdicts with discrimination.

If value judgments are not mere arbitrary decisions, they must be related to what is judged in ways which command general confidence. This is generally interpreted to mean that they must be connected by some method with " the facts." The facts of a work of art, however, are not accessible to superficial attention. The object requires interpretation. This, as we have seen, is also part of the function of the critic. He discovers and presents these facts as grounds for value judgments. What puzzles me is this use of " fact " and " object " in connection with works of art. In what sense is an interpretation which is used to justify a value judgment, the giving of information about facts which supports it? As I have already said, I find it difficult to believe that we could draw Reynolds attention to any facts about Venetian paintings with which he was not expertly acquainted. Yet he placed them only in the second class. Is it not, perhaps, also that we, who judge, are different and yet that we are not merely expressing personal preferences?

Mrs. Knight compared the use of " good " in " ' Persuasion ' is a good novel " with its use in such judgments as " 'Serena ' is a good Persian cat " ; " ' Lady Jane ' is a good arum lily " ; " Joan is a good knitter," etc.[2] The similarity in all such uses is the existence of a set of criteria-qualities for good novels, good persian cats, good knitters, etc., which, when indicated, justify the use of " good " for each type of performance. Works of art may be good for many reasons. There are many different criteria of merit recognised by critics. They form an indefinite and increasing family. We can, however, recognise their exemplification in particular works of art and judge accordingly. The prize is given in respect of criteria-characters. Many of these criteria are expressed in the canons to which Mr. Holloway refers.

[2] Helen Knight: " The Use of ' Good ' in Aesthetic Judgment," *Proc. Aris. Soc.* 1935-36, pp. 207-222.

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Mrs. Knight's interesting account does not quite satisfy me, for two reasons. (1) Two persian cats, two tennis players, two roses, two knitters, may tie for first place. There may be "nothing to choose between them." They exemplify the agreed characters to an indistinguishable degree. But I am not sure that it makes sense to say that *Emma* and *Persuasion* might compete for the same place; that two works, even by the same artist, might excel by exhibiting certain meritorious characters in a manner which makes them qualitatively indistinguishable. Works of art are unique. Their performance cannot be repeated even by the artist. In this they seem to differ from certain other performances in which what is produced, though numerically different, may be qualitatively exactly similar. This is not a mysterious fact about works of art, but follows, I think, from the way in which we use the term "work of art." (2) The account seems to assume that a work of art is an object rather like a cake, whose meritorious features may be picked out, like plums, and exhibited. The model suggested to me is of a combination of ingredients, which it is the business of the critic to exhibit in order to gain approval for the whole work. '*Hamlet*' names "an object," whose features can be revealed by expert interpretation and their particular result evaluated. Mrs. Knight gives an example of this in the description of its characters by which she would support a favourable verdict on Cezanne's *Green Jar*.[3]

If this were the story of interpreting and evaluating works of art, it is strange that the task seems to be never completed. The characteristics of other objects are not so inexhaustible that they seem to invite re-interpretation in every age. In art, the dead are never finally buried. The revaluating of established, and the resurrecting of forgotten, works is a favourite activity of critics. And think of the procession of critics of Shakespeare. Yet many of them, from Johnson to the latest name, may still be read with profit. Is it because the features of Shakespeare's plays are so inexhaustible that no one critic can ever list them as

[3] *loc. cit. p.* 213.

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adequate grounds for value judgments? Or is it because there is no one object whose features are there to be listed? To suppose that there is seems to me, again, to be misled by the methods of science. Scientists observe and explain the behaviour of objects. Whether bodies are observed to fall by X in Italy in the 16th century or by Y in London in the 20th does not affect the result, unless new facts are discovered. I suggest that new facts in this sense about works of art are discovered only by scholars and historians whose methods are scientific. In this sense we know few facts about Shakespeare's plays that were unknown to Dr. Johnson, though subsequent interpretations of the plays and perhaps their evaluation have differed. This seems, once more, to imply that criticism is just a statement of the critic's personal opinion about a work of art. It is not, of course, so presented. The critic claims to be interpreting *Hamlet*, not himself. So he is. But just as no description of the artist's state of mind when he wrote it would be a substitute for *Hamlet* so no mere account of the contents of the text is a substitute for the work which is evaluated. The work is what the text is interpreted to be, though not every interpretation may be accepted. The only objects we possess, produced by artists, to which we can "draw attention" are physical objects, pictures, texts, scores, etc. These are not what we mean by "works of art." But neither do we mean "These and something more." For there are no "these" of which "work of art" is a name.

This critical function in connection with works of art may be illustrated by another form of interpretation. The presentation of the character of "Hamlet" from Burbage to Olivier is of "the same character" though each may be very different but, apart from presentation through someone, what is *the* character "Hamlet"? Does each actor find something in "Hamlet" missed by others or is the situation not rather that the character of "Hamlet" is defined in terms of this series and evaluated in relation to its members? Music and its executants afford another example of interpretation which seems to constitute a work of art. The actor and executant are not presenting themselves, but the

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character or the sonata. There is not, however, another object which is " the real " Hamlet or sonata whose features these versions are interpreting. This does not, I think, conflict with the statement that a work of art is unique. For the fact that there could not be another play of exactly the same merit as *Hamlet* cannot be incompatible with the fact that there may be many performances of the play. The problem is to explain what we say when we assert that there is such a play, or any work of art.

So, it seems to me, that in evaluating works of art, the critic is like the judge and examiner in giving verdicts on performances. But the performances are very peculiar. For in deciding what they are he seems to contribute to them as the executant contributes to the sonata. And this contribution he must present as the grounds for his verdict. By talking he " shows " the work as the pianist shows it by playing. But showman and work are not related as scientist and facts. Nor does either critic or showman present himself. The critic's performance may be described as an impersonal presentation from a personal point of view.

There is still the question of how we choose between better and worse judgments from different points of view. I do not think we do so by reference to the qualities of some mythical object the " real work of art " independent of all interpretation. That seems sheer metaphysics due to misplaced scientism. Some critics and their versions may be better than others for all sorts of reasons. On the whole we trust those who have more experience. Sometimes we may even trust our own judgment more than that of any professional critic.

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